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Cuba as 'Collective Responsibility'

The Senate Foreign Relations Committee has spent parts of two days in questioning Secretary Rusk and Director Allen W. Dulles and Deputy Director Richard M. Bissell, Jr., of the Central Intelligence Agency, about the Cuban operation that flopped.

Out of that experience the committee chairman, Senator Fulbright, has now concluded that the White House, the State Department, the Defense Department, and the CIA share "a collective responsibility" for the failure.

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This is bad news. If it is possible to imagine that one official, or two or three, or a handful, were guilty of the serious misjudgment that was actually made, then it would be easier to apply such corrections as the situation called for.

But Senator Fulbright seems to be saying that the misjudgment, far from being the mistake of a few men, was the mistake of a great many. It was the mistake of intelligence agents, operators, and evaluationists. It was the mistake

of men of foreign experience. It was the mistake of men of military experience. It was the mistake of the executive office of the United States government.

Put another way, this appears to have been the mistake of President Kennedy and some of his White House staff; of Secretary Rusk and some of his State Department officials; of Secretary McNamara and the Joint Chiefs of Staff and some of their advisors; and of Mr. Dulles, Mr. Bissell, and some of their advisors.

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The error, in brief, appears from Senator Fulbright's conclusion, to run through a large part of the high command of the American government.

This, we repeat, is serious. Senator Fulbright (who has been reported to have made his opposition to the enterprise known but has not himself sought to make capital out of that judgment) did not mention any names. Perhaps this is not the time to mention names. Almost surely there were some officials with doubt or outright opposition, and certainly many were not in-

volved in the enterprise at all. But there is now evidence of unquestioned authenticity to the effect that many men had a hand in what Senator Fulbright has called "collective responsibility."

What to do about such a broadly-based misjudgment is difficult to say. But it would be worse yet if it did not lead every official who did participate in this "collective responsibility" to ask questions of the greatest gravity to himself. There are signs of attempts to deal more wisely with pending decisions, notably in the conferences President Kennedy has held almost daily and obviously with serious purposes. But whatever else should be done, the first issue is a personal one with every man who shares responsibility.

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Even when it is granted that it is easier to see, at the end rather than at the start, the obstacles on which this enterprise crashed, and granted that this was a kind of enterprise in which American experience is limited, still the worst that could result would be a failure to learn the primary lessons.